



America's Voices on Border Security

Congress Hears About Criminal Activity and Violence along the Border

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-- John M. Moriarty, Inspector General

Texas Department of Criminal Justice

August 16, 2006

At a House Homeland Security Investigations Subcommittee hearing in Houston today, local and state officials testified about the problems of criminal activity and violence along the U.S./Mexico border. Officials noted the burden that illegal immigration puts on the criminal justice system, and the increased costs it imposes on taxpayers. Excerpts from some of the prepared testimony are below:

Sheriff A. D'Wayne Jernigan, Val Verde County, Texas

Texas Border Sheriff's Coalition

"We felt that as citizens of this great country, our almost 2,000 miles of border was very porous, that many people whose intentions were unknown were coming into our country. If their intentions were to commit acts similar to or worse than what happened on September 11, 2001, then very little was being done to stop them.... We realize that we are a bi-partisan multi ethnic coalition of Law Enforcement professionals. The crisis that we face on our border is not a racial issue, or even one of politics. This crisis is a red white and blue national security crisis."

"Through intelligence information we have also learned that several murders in Laredo, Webb County, Texas, have been orchestrated by members of drug cartels

operating in both countries. These drug cartel enforcers cross the Rio Grande River, commit their murders in the United States, then head back to Mexico, again, via the Rio Grande River.”

“...a high-ranking member of the *Mara Salvatrucha*, or MS-13, was apprehended in the Brooks County area, also in south Texas. He had entered the country illegally. This MS-13 member is believed to have been responsible for the killing of close to 30 persons, or more, in a bus explosion in his native country. It is my understanding that he had a lengthy criminal record in the United States. This person, as many others, find it very easy to come into our country through a very porous, wide-open, and unprotected border. Twenty seven members of the MS-13 were apprehended entering the United States in the Del Rio area of operations during the month of January, 2006.”

“The problems along the border will continue unless our federal government does something about it soon. How many more officers must die like the unfortunate Starr County correctional officer, who was assassinated last month, before our nation will act?”

John M. Moriarty, Inspector General
Texas Department of Criminal Justice

“Any estimate of the cost of housing illegal aliens in the Texas prison system must take into account the lack of definitive data regarding the number of illegal aliens, but Texas Department of Criminal Justice estimates the cost of housing illegal aliens during FY 2005 at \$132 million..... Groups such as the Texas Syndicate, Mexican Mafia, MS-13, Barrio Azteca and Partido Revolucionario Mexicanos (PRM) are active and operational within our prison facilities.”

“My office, on average conducts 3000 felony crime investigations inside the fences of the Texas prison system. The prosecution of these crimes put pressure on the local, usually rural, courts system in the communities where the prisons are located. This is a good example of how the confinement of illegal foreign nationals affects every community in Texas where a prison is located. A cooperative effort between federal, state and local law enforcement is necessary to be successful in combating this problem.”

Robert A. Eckels, County Judge
Harris County, Texas

“While we cannot accurately quantify the impact that illegal immigration has on public education in Harris County, there is no way to deny that there is a

substantial impact. Based mostly on anecdotal evidence from administrators, teachers and students who tell of their experiences with over-crowding, security and discipline problems as well as substantial language barriers and cultural differences that distract from the quality of education received in the classroom, there is no way to deny that problems exist and have existed for generations.”

“From 2002 to 2005 the [Harris County Hospital] District saw a 17.7% increase of undocumented inpatients served and a 50% increase in cost for services rendered. The total cost for undocumented inpatients for 2005 was \$82,240,000 with a four-year total (2002-2005) of \$272,600,000. Looking at undocumented outpatients served by the District, outpatient clinical activity grew from 177,981 visits in 2002 to 272,067 in 2005, representing a 52.8% increase during that time period. In 2005, undocumented outpatients generated approximately 18% of District total outpatient visits. The costs for outpatient clinical services grew from \$19,600,000 in 2002 to \$38,400,000 in 2005, representing a 96% growth rate.”

“In the past four-year period an average of 19% of Misdemeanor Defendant Interviews were with non-U.S. Citizens. While 48.8% were legal residents or legally permitted to be in the U.S., 51.2% were undocumented and therefore illegally in this country. Of the total Misdemeanor Defendant Interviews, 10.2% were with illegal aliens. The number of illegal aliens who are defendants in misdemeanor cases in our courts have been trending upward by about 2.16% per year.”

Major Michael J. O'Brien
Harris County Sheriff's Office

“One of the most prevalent crimes involving illegal immigrants in Harris County involves Human Trafficking. The difference between human trafficking and smuggling is the heinous treatment of the victims which can equate to modern day slavery. There have been numerous instances where non-U.S. citizens (predominantly from Mexico) have paid large amounts of money to be smuggled over the border, only to be held for ransom until they pay or work off additional fees. If they can't pay, many times their families are blackmailed and ransom payments are required for their release. Some of these cases have included severe torture of the victim while the smuggler is on the telephone with relatives so they can hear the screams of pain. If they still can't pay, they are often locked in back rooms and forced to work as prostitutes or in some other type of confined forced labor. The outcome is that some illegal immigrants become

modern day indentured slaves who have no choice but to comply with the smugglers' demands."

"One of the major problems faced by ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement], as well as local law enforcement, is the lack of bed space to hold illegal aliens. Throughout the nation there are less than 20,000 beds dedicated to immigration violation offenders. Consequently, illegal aliens involved in minor crimes are given the equivalent of a summons and told to report to court. In most cases, these persons never report and subsequently disappear into the community using different forms of identification."

Charles Rosenthal Jr., District Attorney

Harris County Texas

"Police agencies can tell you that the immigrant population under-reports crimes. Often, this includes crimes committed by other immigrants. It has been my personal experience that if undocumented aliens become witnesses to crime, they often give false names and/or addresses to the police and are not available as witnesses at trial. Without witnesses, defendants are more difficult to convict."

"I can also testify, that many people who commit crimes flee the United States. Many of our neighboring countries to the South do not have extradition treaties with the United States or refuse extradite their own nationals. Countries that do have extradition treaties with the United States, like Mexico, often attempt to make extradition conditional on the maximum term of years we will seek upon conviction."

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